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# Not ready for robots in homes? The maker of a friendly new humanoid thinks it might change your mind

By **MATT O'BRIEN**  
AP Technology Writer

**NEW YORK (AP)** — As the new robot called Sprout walks around a Manhattan office, nodding its rectangular head, lifting its windshield wiper-like "eyebrows" and offering to shake your hand with its grippers, it looks nothing like the sleek and intimidating humanoids built by companies like Tesla.

Sprout's charm is the point. A 5-year-old child could comfortably talk at eye level with this humanoid, which stands 3.5 feet (1 meter) tall and wears a soft, padded exterior of sage-green foam.

Forged by stealth startup Fauna Robotics over two years of secret research and development, Sprout's public debut on Tuesday aims to jump-start a whole new industry of building "approachable" robots for homes, schools and social spaces.

The robot is in many ways the first of its kind, at least in the United States, even as rapid advances in artificial intelligence and robot engineering have finally made it possible to start building such machines. If its emotive expressions and blinking lights seem vaguely familiar, it might be from generations of Star Wars droids and other endearingly clunky robotic sidekicks dreamed up in animation studios and children's literature.

"Most people in this industry take inspiration from the science fiction that we grew up with," said Fauna Robotics co-founder and CEO Rob Cochran. "I think some do so from 'Westworld' and 'Terminator.' We do from WALL-E and Baymax and Rosie Jetson."

## Making a business case for robots that won't work in car assembly lines

The usual hypothesis for the commercialization of humanoid robots is that they will get their first jobs in warehouses or factories long before they are ready



**Fauna Robotics' new robot, called Sprout, gets up from the prone position to demonstrate its maneuverability in New York, Wednesday, Jan. 14, 2026.**

for homes. That's the path proposed for two of today's best-known prototypes: Tesla's Optimus, which CEO Elon Musk sees as the car-maker's future, and Boston Dynamics' Atlas, which parent company Hyundai plans to deploy in car manufacturing by 2028.

Fauna looks to skip that step for an entirely different clientele: other robot tinkerers. Much as early personal computers and, later, smartphones sparked a culture of developers designing new games and applications, Sprout is a software developer platform more than just a robot. It's also a mechanically complex one that will cost buyers \$50,000.

That's a price some university research labs and technology entrepreneurs are already spending on China's Unitree, which sells a lightweight humanoid often seen at robotics conferences and competitions. Others have avoided Chinese hardware due to tariffs and broader security concerns.

Cochran believes Fauna is "the first American company to be actively shipping robots as a developer platform" and has been hand-delivering the first models. Early customers include Dis-

ney and Boston Dynamics. "You take it out of the box and you can start walking it around immediately," said Marc Theermann, chief strategy officer at Boston Dynamics, in a recent interview. "Seeing their robot for the first time really lets you see the future a little bit. And if you squint, you can see how a robot like that would be welcomed into people's homes."

## Inside the testing grounds for a 'friendly humanoid' robot

Sprout can't lift heavy objects, but it can dance the Twist or the Floss, grab a toy block or teddy bear, or hoist itself from a chair to take a long stroll along the wood floors of Fauna's headquarters in New York City's Flatiron District.

Cochran and co-founder Josh Merel, the company's chief technology officer, demonstrated the robot to The Associated Press in mid-January ahead of its public launch. Fauna employees and an AP reporter piloted the robot, using a video game controller, a phone application and a virtual-reality headset. Sprout also knows the office layout enough to be sent on a planned mission, such as to check out the inventory of the break room

refrigerator.

It walks slowly but steadily on uneven ground. Only once it came close to tripping, taking a sharp turn to avoid a person and instead hitting its foot on a protruding table wheel too low to the ground to be seen by Sprout's camera eyes. But the robot, built to handle what engineers call perturbation, quickly recovered its balance and kept walking, much like a clumsy person might.

"If you step in front of it, it won't crash into you, it'll plan a new path around you," said Ana Pervan, a Fauna research scientist who works on the robot's mapping and navigation. Among the first batch of Fauna's 50 employees, and a fan of science fiction writer Isaac Asimov, she previously worked on self-driving cars but was excited about joining a startup building something that might one day serve as a robot butler. "It's cute, and it's not too humanoid, and I think that actually makes it a lot more fun," Pervan said. "It's not verging on creepy or trying to be too human. It's like your buddy, your pal, that's a different thing than you."

## Why Fauna's founders believe now's the time to bet

## on humanoids

Starting a robot company can be unforgiving, especially one designing personal robots. One of the few successes, Roomba vacuum maker iRobot, had a decades-long run before filing for bankruptcy protection last month.

Most others didn't last that long, like Anki, maker of the playful toy robot Cozmo, or Jibo, which went out of business less than a year after its dynamic talking speaker made the cover of Time Magazine's 2017 "best inventions" edition.

"There were a lot of really brilliant attempts. I think the technology wasn't quite there," Cochran said. "I do think we're right on the precipice now where you could build a companion that is present, engaging, delightful to be around, and can also move around a space in a way that nothing ever has before."

Merel, an expert in robot locomotion, previously worked for Google's DeepMind, where he focused on teaching robots using AI learning techniques in simulated environments, a controversial approach but now increasingly how robots are built. The science journal Nature published his study on an AI-powered virtual rat, co-authored with another of Fauna's research scientists, Diego Al-darondo.

Cochran and Merel later worked together at CTRL-labs, a wearable neurotech company sold to Facebook in 2019. Cochran jokes that he then "spent a misguided four years at Goldman Sachs" before they decided to team up again. Improvements in AI, motors and batteries have accelerated humanoid development. But Fauna's founders agreed that the dystopian aesthetic of many prototypes what Cochran calls "industrial automotive machismo" conveyed strength and confidence but wouldn't work for intimate human spaces. □



# Death Valley landmark Scotty's Castle is reopening for limited tours after years of flood repairs

By JESSICA HILL  
Associated Press

**DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK, Calif. (AP)** — Scotty's Castle, a 1920s vacation home for a millionaire couple and the domain of a famous con man, was a top attraction in Death Valley National Park before it closed from a flash flood. After 10 years of repairs, the landmark is offering limited tours.

The castle nestled into a desert hillside tells the perfect Wild West story of a cunning cowboy, a search for gold, a shootout with bandits and friendship. It is a great tale even if some of it was made up.

"The story of how it came to be in this extremely unlikely place is what makes it so special," said Abby Wines, acting deputy superintendent of Death Valley National Park.

The National Park Service opened up the grounds for limited flood-recovery tours in the coming months, and its full reopening is eyed for a few years from now.

Around 1.4 million people visit the park located in California and Nevada every year. It is well known as the hottest place in North America and as the driest



Scotty's Castle is seen Friday, Jan. 23, 2026, in Death Valley National Park, Calif.

Associated Press

and lowest place in the continent at 282 feet below sea level.

## Gold, bandits and unlikely friends

In its heyday, the castle was "the stage for a massive practical joke on all of America," Wines said. Walter Scott, a con man nicknamed "Death Valley Scotty" and a former rider for the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show, took up gold prospecting, convincing peo-

ple to invest in a fictional gold mine in Death Valley, where he thought none of his investors would dare to visit.

He struck the mother lode when he met Albert Johnson, who made his money in mines and health insurance. He invested in the mine but traveled to Death Valley to see where his money was going. Scott tried to scare the man off by staging a gunfight with bandits.

Johnson realized it was a scam, but he didn't mind. He found the dry desert air good for his health, and he enjoyed the adventure, Wines said. He brought his wife, Bessie Johnson, and they became friends with Scott.

Over nine years, they built a vacation home they called Death Valley Ranch. But Scott lived on the grounds until he died, and everyone referred to it as Scotty's

Castle. He is buried on top of a hill overlooking the property.

Inspired by the sandstone buildings and red tile roofs of Stanford University, where Bessie Johnson went to school, the castle is decorated with stucco walls, painted tiles and elaborate woodwork. A music room with a player pipe organ, arched ceilings and a stained-glass window served as a space for entertaining guests. Outside, a weather vane of Scott is perched on the roof, and a clock tower overlooks the valley.

An incomplete pool shows the point in history when Johnson's business failed and he couldn't afford to restart construction.

Visitors stopped by the castle to see Scott and his famed gold mine when Death Valley became a national monument in 1933. Continuing his charade, he would tell visitors he built "his" castle on top of the mine. Servants went into tunnels beneath the castle and banged on pots and pans, creating the illusion of a working mine, Wines said. The Johnsons found the story entertaining. □

# Family in Kentucky shelters struggling calf born amid extreme cold temperatures

By DYLAN LOVAN  
Associated Press

**LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP)** — A Kentucky family battling extreme cold temperatures on their farm over the weekend opened their home to a newborn calf that was struggling in the deep freeze. Hours later, the calf, fed and fluffed, took a spot on the couch with the Sorrell family's two children. Their mom, Macey Sorrell, snapped some photos and later posted them to social media, and the cuteness did not go unnoticed.

The calf was born outdoors in single digit temperatures on Saturday. Macey Sorrell said her husband, Tanner,

went outside to check on the pregnant mother and found the calf, suffering in the cold.

"She was just frozen. Her umbilical cord looked like a popsicle," Macey Sorrell said Thursday from her home in Mount Sterling, Kentucky. "It was just frozen."

After losing a calf last winter to frostbite, the family moved quickly to bring the baby inside to clean her off and warm her up.

"When we brought her in, she had ice on her. The afterbirth was still on her, I had to wipe all that off," Sorrell said. "I took out the blow dryer and warmed her up,

and got her all fluffed out." Soon the calf was lying on the couch, cuddling with her young children.

"They crawled up next to her like it was just the most normal thing," she said. Her 3-year-old son, Gregory, decided to name the calf Sally, a character from his favorite movie, "Cars."

The family keeps about three dozen cows on their land and are used to bringing farm animals indoors from time to time. Sally was reunited with her mother the next morning, and is doing well, Sorrell said.

Sorrell said she almost didn't share the photos on social

media, because it was nothing new to the family to bring an animal indoors when necessary. Several

commented on the cuteness of the photos. "It's just part of what you do," she said. □



In this photo provided by Macey Sorrell, 3-year-old Gregory Sorrell cuddles with a calf his family brought indoors during extreme cold temperatures in Mount Sterling, Ky., on Saturday, Jan. 24, 2026. At right is his sister, Charlee Sorrell, 2.

Associated Press



# As if! 'Clueless,' 'The Karate Kid,' 'Inception' among 25 movies entering National Film Registry

By **JOCELYN NOVECK** AP National Writer

As if they'd leave "Clueless" off the list.

Cher Horowitz fans, rejoice: Amy Heckerling's 1995 teen comedy is one of 25 classic movies chosen this year by the Library of Congress for its National Film Registry.

And if "Clueless" wasn't your jam whatever! maybe this will send you deep into your dreams: Christopher Nolan's mind-bending "Inception" is in the mix. Other films chosen for preservation include "The Karate Kid," "Glory," "Philadelphia," "Before Sunrise," "The Incredibles" and "Frida." There are four documentaries, including "Brooklyn Bridge" by Ken Burns. From old Hollywood, there's the 1954 musical "White Christmas," and the 1956 "High Society," Grace Kelly's last movie before marrying into royalty.

Since 1988, the Library of Congress has selected 25 movies each year for preservation due to their "cultural, historic or aesthetic importance." The films must be at least 10 years old.

The oldest of the 2025 picks dates from 1896, filmmaker William Selig's "The Tramp and the Dog." The newest of the group is from 2014: Wes Anderson's "The Grand Budapest Hotel," which, the registry noted, involved "meticulous historical research



This image released by the Library of Congress shows Alicia Silverstone in a scene from the 1995 film "Clueless," one of 25 classic movies chosen this year by the Library of Congress for its National Film Registry.

at the Library of Congress to create visually striking scenery."

Turner Classic Movies will host a TV special March 19 to screen a selection of the films.

A closer look at some of this year's selections:

"The Tramp and the Dog" (1896): Once deemed lost, but discovered in 2021 at the National Library of Norway, Selig's silent film tells the story of a tramp who tries to steal a pie from a backyard windowsill and is foiled by a dog. The registry notes it's an early example of "pants humor" "where a

character loses (or almost loses) its pants during an altercation."

"The Maid of McMillan" (1916): This 15-minute silent film, a "whimsical silent romance" shot by students at a drama club at Washington University in St. Louis, tells the story of the track team captain, Jack, who's in love with Myrtle, "a pretty coed," according to the university's library. It is known, the registry says, as the first student film on record. "Ten Nights in a Barroom" (1926): A silent film featuring an all-Black cast, it's based on a stage melodrama adapted from "Ten

Nights in a Bar-room and What I Saw There," an 1854 "temperance novel" written to discourage readers from drinking alcohol.

"High Society" (1956): In what the registry calls "the last great musical of the Golden Age of Hollywood," Bing Crosby appeared with Frank Sinatra and Grace Kelly, in her last movie before retiring and marrying Prince Rainier of Monaco. Louis Armstrong appeared with his band. Kelly wore her Cartier engagement ring during filming, the registry notes.

"Brooklyn Bridge" (1981):

Ken Burns' first documentary broadcast on PBS, in which the filmmaker recounted the building of the iconic landmark. "More than just a filmmaker, Burns has become a trusted public historian," the registry says.

"The Big Chill" (1983): Lawrence Kasdan's era-defining story of a group of friends reuniting after a suicide features Glenn Close, William Hurt, JoBeth Williams, Kevin Kline, Jeff Goldblum and Meg Tilly in an ensemble that "portrays American stereotypes of the time the yuppie, the drug dealer, the TV star and deftly humanizes them."

"The Karate Kid" (1984): The first film in the franchise, starring Ralph Macchio and Pat Morita, is "as American as they come," the registry says "a hero's journey, a sports movie and a teen movie a feel-good movie, but not without grit."

"Glory" (1989): Denzel Washington won an Oscar as Private Trip in this story of the 54th Regiment, a unit of Black soldiers who fought in the Civil War. The cast also included Morgan Freeman, Matthew Broderick, Cary Elwes and Andre Braugher. "Philadelphia" (1993): Tom Hanks starred and won an Oscar in one of the first big studio movies to confront the HIV/AIDS crisis. □

Associated Press

## Cher, Tina Knowles and the late Rob Reiner are among Audie Awards finalists



Rob Reiner appears at the Human Rights Campaign's dinner in Los Angeles on March 22, 2025.

Associated Press

By **HILLEL ITALIE** AP National Writer

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Cher, Tina Knowles and the late Rob Reiner are among the finalists for the 31st annual Audie Awards, which honor the audio editions of fiction and nonfiction books. Cher's narration of "Cher: Part One" brought her a nomination for best biography/autobiography, the Audio Publishers Association announced Thursday. The other finalists are Knowles for "Matriarch," which she narrated along with daughters Beyoncé and Solange among others; the late Virginia Giuffre's memoir about her harrowing years with Jeffrey Epstein, "Nobody's Girl," narrated by Thérèse Plummer and Gabra Zackman; a recording of the late Maya Angelou's

"The Heart of a Woman," narrated by Uzo Aduba; and Scott Payne's "Code Name: Pale Horse," narrated by Payne and collaborator Michelle Shephard.

Suzanne Collins' latest "Hunger Games" novel, "Sunrise on the Reaping," is a nominee for audiobook of the year, along with a new audio edition of Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice"; crime novelist S.A. Cosby's "King of Ashes"; Garrett M. Graff's "The Devil Reached Toward the Sky"; Devney Perry's "Shield of Sparrows"; and Charlotte McConaghy's "Wild Dark Shore."

Narrators for the best book finalists include Oscar-nominated actors Glenn Close, Marianne Jean-Baptiste and Jessie Buckley on "Pride and Prejudice." □



## Water gets the wine treatment in South African tastings



Founder of the Fine water company and water sommelier, Nico Pieterse, poses for a photograph at at Lanzerac in Stellenbosch on January 17, 2026.

**Stellenbosch, South Africa**  
Most tourists to Stellenbosch come for the wine but this small group was here for the water, sampling a selection of the world's finest varieties in an experience new to South Africa.

In a tasting room lined with elegant glass bottles from across the globe, water sommelier Nico Pieterse extolled the qualities and even "emotional connection" of a resource many South Africans take straight from the tap.

"They are mainly award-winning waters," Pieterse said of his collection at his

Fine Water Tasting Room, which he describes as the world's first such venue dedicated solely to water. Around 40 kilometres (25 miles) east of Cape Town, Stellenbosch is a major draw for international and domestic tourists, who flock to sample its internationally recognised wines on a variety of tasting menus.

But Pieterse's passion is water and he boasts a "library" of 40 brands drawn from Armenian volcanic springs to ancient Czech glaciers. Many are from Europe, he told AFP on the sidelines of

a tasting, but there is also one from Himalayan springs in Bhutan and another from a mineral water mecca in Mexico. A bottle of Ice Age glacial water from the Czech mountains contains dazzling specks of 24 carat gold. A bottle from Colombia carries the names of species newly identified in the rainforest.

A tasting session lasting around an hour was a surprise for South African visitor Dere Vermeulen, 19, who normally drinks tap water. "I am the kind of person who says water is water," she told AFP. "But it was

very interesting to actually be able to taste the different flavours in the water. I didn't think I was going to."

### From beer to water

Pieterse, previously a brewer, developed an interest in water during the Covid 19 pandemic when South Africa banned the sale and distribution of alcohol.

It led him to become one of only two certified water sommeliers in South Africa and fewer than 100 worldwide, he said.

As an international water judge, Pieterse blind tastes more than 100 still and 100 sparkling waters at an annual fine water summit that draws connoisseurs from around the world.

At his Stellenbosch tasting room, guests sample six waters three still and three sparkling served in stemware at between 14 and 18 degrees Celsius (57.2 to 64.4 degrees Fahrenheit), while discussing the minerality, "total dissolved solids" and filtration.

Plastic or glass packaging and nitrate levels -- which can indicate pollution at source are other factors, Pieterse said, against a backdrop of Stellenbosch's expansive vineyards and warm mountainscapes. Some bottlers sell tap water purified through reverse

osmosis filtration which removes the minerals and flavour, he said. "It takes everything out of the water so that water is completely dead."

The most expensive item is a German water sold in champagne style bottles for around 5,000 rands (\$310).

Alongside the luxury offerings is a high-mineral South African brand priced on his website at 50 rands for 750 millilitres.

Tap water is generally considered safe to drink in South Africa but in one of the most unequal countries in the world just 45 percent of households had piped drinking water in their dwellings in 2023, according to national statistics.

Another 30 percent were able to drink from a tap in their yards, while others depended on communal taps and rainwater tanks. Failing infrastructure causes regular supply disruptions and has sparked angry protests by communities forced to rely on water tanks brought in by municipalities or NGOs.

The water-stressed nation has also been through severe droughts and periods of low rainfall with entire towns warned their taps could run dry. □

## Rio's favelas become hot tourist destination as visitors seek cultural immersion

By **LUCAS DUMPHREYS** and **ELÉONORE HUGHES**  
**Associated Press**

**RIO DE JANEIRO (AP)** — As record numbers of tourists descend upon Rio de Janeiro, many are looking beyond the city's iconic landmarks, seeking instead local tours in the city's favelas to learn more about the often-stigmatized territories that are also beacons of urban culture and art. The influx of curious visitors has inspired residents of the low-income communities to turn to tourism to generate cash, among them local guide Vitor Oliveira. Oliveira, formerly a motor-

cycle taxi driver in Rocinha Rio's most populated favela said he started to offer tours after noticing an increase in international visitors. Tourism, he said, is now his main source of income. Rio welcomed 12.5 million tourists in 2025, including 2.1 million international visitors, according to Rio City Hall. The number of international tourists jumped by 44.8% compared to 2024, generating 7.8 billion reais (\$1.5 billion) for Rio's economy.

On a busy weekday in late January, Rocinha was teeming with tourists from

Chile and France. Amid the crowds, Oliveira guided Oscar Jara, a Paraguayan, and his nephew, José Martínez, through the favela's narrow streets.

"To come to Rio and only visit Copacabana Beach, the statue of Christ and Sugar Loaf Mountain, you're not really visiting Rio. You're visiting a posh and expensive side of Rio," said Oliveira. "But Rio's essence comes from the favelas." Rocinha is sprayed across a hill that overlooks many of Rio's major landmarks. Oliveira typically starts his tour with viewpoints, then takes tourists to cultural

spots, such as capoeira presentations and artists' galleries. Clients can even

choose to end the tour by having a Brazilian barbecue on his own balcony. □



Tourists play soccer with residents of the Rocinha favela, as Rio de Janeiro recorded a record number of international tourists in 2025, Tuesday, Jan. 27, 2026.

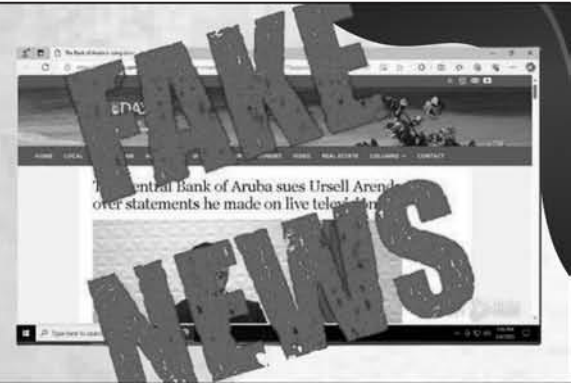
Associated Press



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## So little we know': in submersibles revealing the deep sea

### 'Indonesia

A dome-fronted submersible sinks beneath the waves off Indonesia, heading down nearly 1,000 metres in search of new species, plastic-eating microbes and compounds that could one day make medicines.

This month, AFP boarded one of two submersibles belonging to OceanX, a non-profit backed by billionaire Ray Dalio and his son that brings scientists onto its OceanXplorer ship to study the marine world. The ship boasts labs for genetic sequencing, a helicopter for aerial surveys and a remotely operated vehicle (ROV) capable of descending up to 6,000 metres (19,700 feet) under the ocean surface.

Its two submersibles have everything from hydraulic collection arms and suction tubes to high-definition cameras, allowing them to uncover the improbable life found in some of the harshest conditions on Earth.

The ship's latest mission focuses on a seamount chain off Indonesia's Sulawesi island that scientists on board mapped last year. A new team of Indonesian scientists is now surveying its biodiversity, including with submersible dives that put the researchers right into the environment they are studying.

As the sub dropped below 200 metres, the last traces of light disappeared, and indigo faded into total darkness.

Husna Nugrahapraja, an Indonesian scientist on the mission, admitted feeling "a little bit nervous and anxious" as he descended on his first submersible trip.

It is a "very lonely" environment at first, the assistant



This photo taken on January 12, 2026 shows the crew of the OceanXplorer, a research vessel operated by the marine non-profit OceanX, coordinating safety protocols with a submersible pilot before a deep-sea operations in the waters off Sulawesi island.

professor at Institut Teknologi Bandung told AFP. The craft's lights offered the only illumination, revealing drifts of "marine snow" -- a shower of debris, including decomposing animals, that falls continuously into the depths and creates the impression of an old television stuck between stations.

Marine life that most people never see floated into view, including delicate comb jellies with pulsing fairy-light illuminations along their sides.

Siphonophores largely translucent creatures in fanciful shapes resembling toddlers' drawings glowed as they drifted by, and silver, fingernail-sized fish skittered out of the sub's wake. Finally, Husna said, "We arrive on the seabed... (where) we can see many unique organisms", from delicate sea stars to fronded soft corals.

### 'Quite different'

OceanXplorer's Neptune submersible is designed for

scientific collection and observation, while its Nadir vessel has high-end cameras and lights for media content. That reflects OceanX's view that compelling images make research more accessible and impactful. The subs do not go as deep as an ROV, but offer a unique view, explained Dave Pollock, who heads OceanX's submersible team.

"We get a lot of scientists come on who are very sceptical about subs," he told AFP.

"Pretty much without fail every sceptical scientist that comes on board who gets to go on a dive changes their opinion."

The nearly 360-degree view gives them "a totally different perspective" to the flat video fed up to the ship by the ROV.

"It's quite different when you see it yourself," Husna said. The submersibles also offer unique experiences, including the flashes of light called bioluminescence

that many deep-sea animals produce to communicate, for defence, or to attract mates.

The vessel's powerful light beams can be used to elicit the display.

First, all the lights are switched off. Even the internal control board is covered, plunging the craft's occupants into total darkness.

Then the sub flashes its lights several times while those on board close their eyes. When they open them, a seascape galaxy of stars appears -- the bluish-white flashes of creatures from plankton and jellyfish to shrimp and fish responding to the sub lights.

Pollock, who has spent hundreds of hours diving in submersibles, counts some of the more spectacular "flashback bioluminescence" events as among the most memorable moments in his career.

Submersibles are used in many fields, but many now associate them with the

2023 underwater implosion of the Titan, which killed five people on a trip to explore the Titanic wreck.

Pollock stressed that, unlike Titan, OceanXplorer's vehicles are designed, manufactured and inspected regularly in accordance with industry body DNV.

"The subs are designed safe" and equipped with back-up systems including four days of emergency life support, he said.

### 'So little we know'

For deeper exploration, the scientists rely on OceanX's ROV, operated from a futuristic-looking "mission control" where two crew members sit in gamer-style armchairs.

A bank of screens shows the largely barren seabed, as an operator uses a multi-jointed joystick to operate the robot's hydraulic arm from thousands of metres above.

It resembles a space mission, with an intrepid rover traversing desolate, distant terrain. But here there are aliens. At least that is how some of the species encountered appear to the untrained eye.

There's a bone-white lobster, suctioned up for examination at the surface, and a horned sea cucumber whose mast-like spikes collapse into black spaghetti when it arrives on the ship.

And there's a deep-sea hermit crab, living not inside a shell, but a sea star the team can't immediately identify. The crab has laid lurid orange eggs inside its long-dead host.

Not every collection is a success: a delicate red-orange shrimp daintily eludes the suction tube, swirling its long antenna as it swims almost triumphantly beyond reach. □



# The history and meaning of the Aruban florin

(Oranjestad)—Aruba Today loves to share parts of the Aruban culture with our readers, diving into (historical) facts of Aruba, its culture and way of living. In this article, we'll look at the Aruban florin: its history, design and symbolism.

In Aruba, we know the 5, 10, 25 and 50 cent coins, along with the 1 and 5 Florin coin. Aruban Florin bills include the 10, 25, 50, 100, and rarely, the 200 bills. In Papiamentu we call our currency Florin, but the umbrella term for money is 'placa'. Cents are called 'cen' (pronounced: seng), both in the singular and plural form. Most coins are circular and their size depend on their worth. However, the 50 cent coin is easily recognizable by their square shape, as is the 5 Florin coin by their golden color. Every coin has the Aruban emblem carved on it, with the other side displaying the worth of the coin. The bigger 1 and 5 florin coins, however, contain the carving of the emblem on one side, while displaying the side profile of the Dutch king, Willem-Alexander, on the other side. When his mother, Princess Beatrix, was reigning queen, it was her profile that was carved on the two coins.

## Outdated Aruban coins and their names

In the past, Aruban coins had distinctive names and also varied in worth. For example, a 5-cent coin was once called 'Dos Placa'; 10-cent coins were called 'Debchi'; 25-cent coins were called 'Diez Placa' and the 50-cent coin was once called 'Yotin' (pronounced: jo-teen). We also used a distinctive coins worth 2 ½ cents, called placa too. However, this last coin is no longer in use and has become a relic of Aruban money. Back then, the 5-Florin coin used to also be square, but now it is circular.

## Aruban bills: their design and symbolism

The Aruban Florin collection contains a variation of colorful bills, displaying incredibly detailed and beautiful designs that tell the story of Aruba on a single piece of paper.

Prior to 2019, the Aruban Florin bills were relatively simpler in design compared to now, but still included beautiful designs and colors, often depicting local animals. These past designs were made by the Aruban artist Everino Fingal in 1990 up to 2019. Between 1990 and 1993, the 5 Florin coin was a bill. The Fingal designs also included a 500-Florin bill, which has now been discontinued.

In 2019, the Central Bank of Aruba commis-



sioned a new design of the Aruba Florin bills, this time selecting artist and former art teacher, Nigel Matthew, to present his new design. Matthew kept the tradition of including local animals and the familiar colors on the bills. However, he included additional designs that represent the Aruban culture and link to the Indigenous inhabitants that were the first to set foot on the island.

## Current design and symbolism

### 10 florin

On the 10-florin bill, you can see a Tortuga blanco (white turtle). The blue color symbolizes the blue Caribbean Sea. You can also see the ruins of the Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruins, a coral motif, and the symbols of Cas Floria (traditional Aruban house design) with a piece of mosaic.

### 25 florin

On this orange bill, you can see an Aruban medicinal plant called Shoshoro. The birds Trupiaal, Shoco, rock drawings, and the symbols of Cas Floria with a piece of mosaic are also depicted. There is also a Purun di ceramica (clay pot), in reference to the relics left behind by our indigenous ancestors.

### 50 florin

On this bill, we see the Cododo (blue lizard found on the ABC islands), Cangreu di tera (land crab), Willem III Tower, and again the symbols of Cas Floria with a piece of mosaic, as well as a beach plant called Banana di rif. The colors are pink/purple.

### 100 florin

This bill is green in color, representing nature. Here we see the Yuwana (Iguana), Aloe, Toteki (lizard), the symbols of Cas Floria with a piece of mosaic, and a dance group performing the Baile di cinta (folkloric dance with silk ribbons).

### 200 florin

There is another bill with a value of 200 dollars. The brown color symbolizes the earth of Aruba. Here we see the Dornasol and the Warawara—both local birds, along with the symbols of Cas Floria with a piece of mosaic, the Tuna cactus plant, and the Caha di orgel (folkloric instrument, used for many traditional songs).

## Extra fact:

The word "florin" is supposedly named after the Italian city of Florence or it's a reference to the Italian word "florino", both explanations related to historical Italian currencies. □

**Source: Placa, placa, placa by the National Library of Aruba**





## Today is going to be a good day



(Oranjestad)—Here's why: **Aruba Today collected some things to do BEYOND the beach. Yes, we know. Aruba, located 15 miles north of Venezuela in the warm waters of the southern Caribbean, is home to beautiful white-sand beaches, 82-degree days, and thus ideal for the perfect beach day. But we are also blessed with some of the warmest people in the world and our island is 19.6 miles long and 6 miles across, with a total area of 70 square miles. Bit more to discover than the white stretch on the coastline we say. Let's mention some of these hidden gems.**

### Nature Calls

The Arikok National park is worth the ride. We love the hikes that are guided by the park's rangers whose job is to maintain trails and protect natural resources. The flora and fauna are beautiful and the historical sites tell you about the island's indigenous roots. The guided tours are even free of charge. If you are not up to walking, you can drive through the park, one way or another this park is a great place to spend an entire day. Cruising through the landscape you end up at some of the most stunning beaches like Dos Playa or Daimara Beach. In Total the park consists of

7907 acres protected nature with a richness of animals living in it. The Aruban whiptail lizard (cododo), Aruban cat eye snake (santanero) and endangered rattle snake (cascabel) are just some of them, you can also admire these close in the park's Visitors' Center.

For more information, visit the website [www.acf.aw](http://www.acf.aw)

### The Lighthouse

No, you would not think of this as a hidden gem. The California Lighthouse is actually one of the most known highlights in Aruba and many repeated guests most probably took the ride uphill already. But, there is a significant change to this tower. Since September 2016 you can climb the top. In 2015 Stichting Monumentenfonds started the restoration of the California Lighthouse. The project finished in September 2016 and the Lighthouse is now open for visitors to enjoy the beautiful view from the top. The construction of the California Lighthouse started in 1915. The name 'California' came from a vessel



of the West India Company and Pacific Steamship Co. called 'California' that shipwrecked in the area in 1891. Therefore they came up with the idea of building a lighthouse that could indicate the island's eastern tip to ships with its light.

### Kayak in the Mangroves

Mangel Halto at Savaneta is definitely a place not to miss out on. The beauti-

ful beach with the natural mangroves is simply a beauty, but if you are into a more active way to enjoy the nature: take a kayak. While you are doing some workout—as it might get a little windy and rough—you will see the island from a different perspective. You can even make a stop to do some snorkeling at the reef. It's fun, it's healthy and for sure something else. □

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## Cave pool at Bushiribana no longer accessible

(Oranjestad)—This week on the tourist page 'All Things Aruba', one user said that the cave pool at Bushiribana is no longer accessible.

The user lamented that this was due to it being too dangerous to climb down to. While this cave pool has always been trickier to navigate, many tours included this spot in their itinerary, where

guides provided a hand and advice when climbing down. However, it now seems that the ladder has been removed and is therefore no longer accessible.

As unfortunate as this new development is, safety comes above all else, so we highly advise to maintain your distance and do not try to access the pool. □



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## Birds of Aruba: Soaring through the blue skies

(Oranjestad)—Aruba's nature is very diverse and is home to several beautiful and majestic wildlife. Among these is the bright Trupial, whose angelic voice is always heard with the rising sun; the cuddly parakeet, always in company of another, and the majestic Warawara, a mighty bird that can be seen soaring in the clear blue skies.

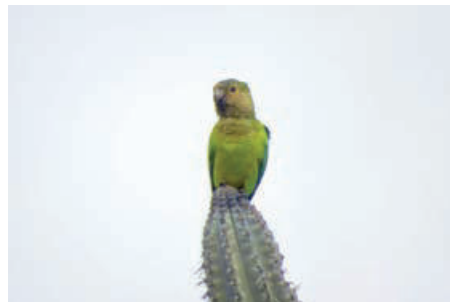


**Trupial**

*Icterus icterus*, or known locally as the Venezuelan or Orange Troupial, is a striking songbird whose bright orange feathers can be spotted from a far distance. Known to be the first

bird to sing at the first sign of sunrise, this beloved songbird likes to wake up with a tune. But don't let their angelic songs fool you; the Trupial can be a bit aggressive towards any threat, protective over their nesting spots—nesting spots they most likely stole from other birds. Trupials can be seen regularly, often in trees or on top of a cactus.

Photo Credit: Daniel Ruben Gonzalez



**Prikichi (parakeet)**

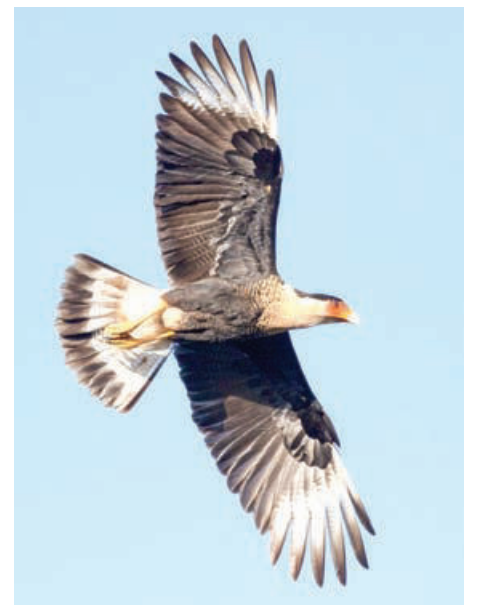
The Brown-throated Prikichi (*Aratinga pertinax*) became the national bird of Aruba back in 2015, at the re-

quest of Aruba Birdlife Conservation. The bright green, adorable parakeet usually flies in flock of 30 or more, but its population has been declining since the 2010s. Prikichis are a shier breed than the trupial, often flying away at the sign of any threat. They use termite nests for breeding spots and feed mostly on seeds from the Kwihi tree, Divi Divi tree and fruits.

Photo Credit: Daniel Ruben Gonzalez

### Warawara

The Warawara or Caracara is one of the biggest birds found in the Aruban *mondi*. At a height of 41 to 60 cm, their wingspan can measure up to 125 cm. Known as the "garbage man", this bird of prey mostly feeds on dead animals. Its coat is dark brown, with a cream-colored neck, orange face, thick beak and long legs. The Warawara prefers to build its nest in the middle of tall cacti and produces a rattling, screaming sound, throwing its head back onto its back while calling.



While these birds are a beautiful sight to behold, it is very important to keep your distance and respect their habitats. This is how we protect our wildlife. By admiring the beauty of Aruba in a safe and respectful manner, we can do our part in protecting our sacred nature. □

Photo Credit: Aruba Birdlife Conservation

## PSA for off-roaders:

## Be careful when driving on rough terrains!

(Oranjestad)—Aruba Today recently received a message from a reader about the rough terrains and dirt roads on the northern side of the island, worried about how they may damage your car.

We at Aruba Today pride ourselves in enhancing your Aruba experience through informative articles about our history, culture and places you can visit. With this, we also want to make sure you take care of yourself and your loved ones.

You may encounter some dirt roads that have deep holes or cracks that can be damaging

if you are traveling by (regular) car. These holes often occur after heavy rain or during the raining season, primarily because Aruba is a hilly island with a lot of downward streams, so rain water travels downward creating cracks and holes along the way.

For your own safety, please be advised to not drive on potentially dangerous terrains or dirt roads with deep holes if you are traveling by regular car. We advise you to rent a 4x4 vehicle instead or better yet, plan your off-roading trip with a tour guide who can provide proper vehicles and assistance. □





## Meet Aruba's biggest hero, Boy Ecury



**(Oranjestad)—As part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and due to its strategic geolocation, Aruba was unexpectedly involved in the Second World War. As is known around the globe, this chapter in world history is one of the most tragic yet, and many soldiers and rebels have died on the front line during this time.**

One of those rebels who have fought against the Nazi regime, was an Aruban named Segundo Jorge Adelberto "Boy" Ecury. Born in Aruba on April 23rd, 1922, Boy spent his childhood on the island, before being sent to The Netherlands by his father when he was 15 years old to continue his studies abroad. This was in 1937, three years before WWII broke out.

During the war, he actively participated in the rebellion in The Netherlands against the Nazi regime, but his rebellious streak and constant drive to fight for justice began even before the war broke out. Being a person of color with a Haitian heritage living in The Netherlands made him vulnerable to discrimination, and this inspired him to be an activist, to stand up and fight against discrimination and oppression.

After seeing the horrific bombings of Rotterdam first-hand, he decided to join the resistance. At the same time, he was still studying and living with family in Tilburg. It was there where he met people who printed and distributed the rebellion newspaper. This would be the first of three rebellion group that he would join throughout his 4-year service to the resistance.

Boy's primary task as member of the group was to distract the German soldiers while others ran into hiding into alleyways. This he was able to do because of his skin color and confronting demeanor. Boy also participated in the multiple sabotaging operations against the German military occupying The Netherlands. These included bombings on German military trucks and trains. The group also helped people go into hiding, as well as opened fire against allies of the Nazi regime. In these operations, Boy really stood out for his cold bloodedness.

In 1943, he received a notice to be placed for work in Germany. This he refused, of course, and went into hiding using multiple addresses in multiple cities. Because he was a wanted man, he of course could not continue to be active as a rebel. However, stubborn and naturally rebellious as he was, he always tried to join in on the operations regardless.

In 1944, after his friend Luis de Lannoy, a fellow rebel from Curacao, was arrested and executed, he moved to Delft, where he joined his third and last group in Rotterdam. During this time, he wrote a goodbye letter for his family, possibly knowing the risks of him being active again in the big cities.

Eventually, he proved himself right. On November 5th, 1944, Boy Ecury was arrested by German soldiers. He was placed in the "Oranjehotel" prison in Scheveningen, The Hague, where he was questioned. Despite being sold out by an acquaintance, he himself never gave away the names of his comrades. Famously, he told his cell mate: "I will die with a smile on my face."

On November 6th, 1944, Ecury was executed. He was only 22 years old. Ecury was buried with military honor. In 1949, the Aruban Government erected a monumental bust of him in front of what is now the linear park trail, and in 1984 he received the Resistance Memorial Cross postmortem.

Boy's life motto was this: "In my father's house, there is no place for a traitor." □

**Source: "De Kolibrie op de Rots (en meer over the geschiedenis van Aruba)" by Evert Bongers.**



*Opinion written by anonymous reader*

## Forbes Got Aruba's Dining Scene Wrong

**The recent Forbes article claiming to present the "best restaurants in Aruba" is not serious food journalism. It is, at best, a glossy tourism piece disguised as culinary authority.**

As an Aruban-born resident and an international traveler who has dined in Michelin-star restaurants across Europe, North America, and beyond, I have experienced what real excellence looks like. I have also eaten in every restaurant mentioned in the Forbes article. And I can state plainly: the praise being handed out does not match reality.

This is not a personal attack on the restaurants. Some are pleasant. Some are decent. A few are good within the context of Aruba's tourism market. But calling them "the best" in a way that suggests international-level quality is misleading.

The problem is not taste. The problem is standards.

Real restaurant criticism is built on technique, consistency, discipline, ingredient quality, balance, execution, and professionalism. The Forbes article evaluates none of this. Instead, it leans heavily on atmosphere, storytelling, branding, and curated experience — the language of marketing, not gastronomy.

That distinction matters.

When a platform like Forbes publishes such a list, readers expect credibility. What they get instead is a polished brochure for tourists.

There is also an uncomfortable truth that no one wants to say aloud: Aruba's tourism market is not dominated by experienced fine-dining guests. Many visitors are easily impressed by décor, price, and presentation. That creates an environment where mediocrity can be oversold and where genuine critique is avoided to preserve commercial relationships.

That may be good for short-term promotion. But it is bad for Aruba.

Inflated praise does not elevate the island's culinary reputation — it damages it. Serious diners recognize exaggeration immediately. Over time, credibility erodes.

If Aruba wants to grow as a culinary destination, it does not need flattery. It needs honesty. It needs higher standards. It needs critics who are willing to say: this is good, this is average, this is not acceptable — and this is where excellence truly begins.

What Forbes delivered instead is safe, promotional, and superficial.

Aruba deserves better than marketing copy dressed up as journalism.



## Ayo & Casibari: Aruba's famous rock formations



**(Oranjestad)—The Ayo and Casibari Rock Formations are known locally as one of the crucial sites to have in your “off-road” trip itinerary. These naturally formed rock formations as just one of the few places on the island that hold a rich history of our culture and of our ancestors.**

### Ayo

The Ayo Rock Formation is located in the northern part of the island, right on the road that leads you to the Black Stone Beach, and close to the Natural Bridge. The Ayo is a fenced terrain that consists of several giant boulders, resting neatly on top of or side by side each other, adding gorgeous natural architecture to the surrounding “mondi”\*. This is also one of the few sites to contain prehistoric markings of

our indigenous ancestors. The Ayo Rock formation contains stairs that

lead you to the top of the highest boulder, offering a breath-taking view of the Aruban backyard. The Ayo is usually quiet, as it is situated farther away from the busier parts of the island. However, this is just another charm of the site: the quiet area and the refreshing breeze offer a sense of comfort and peace.

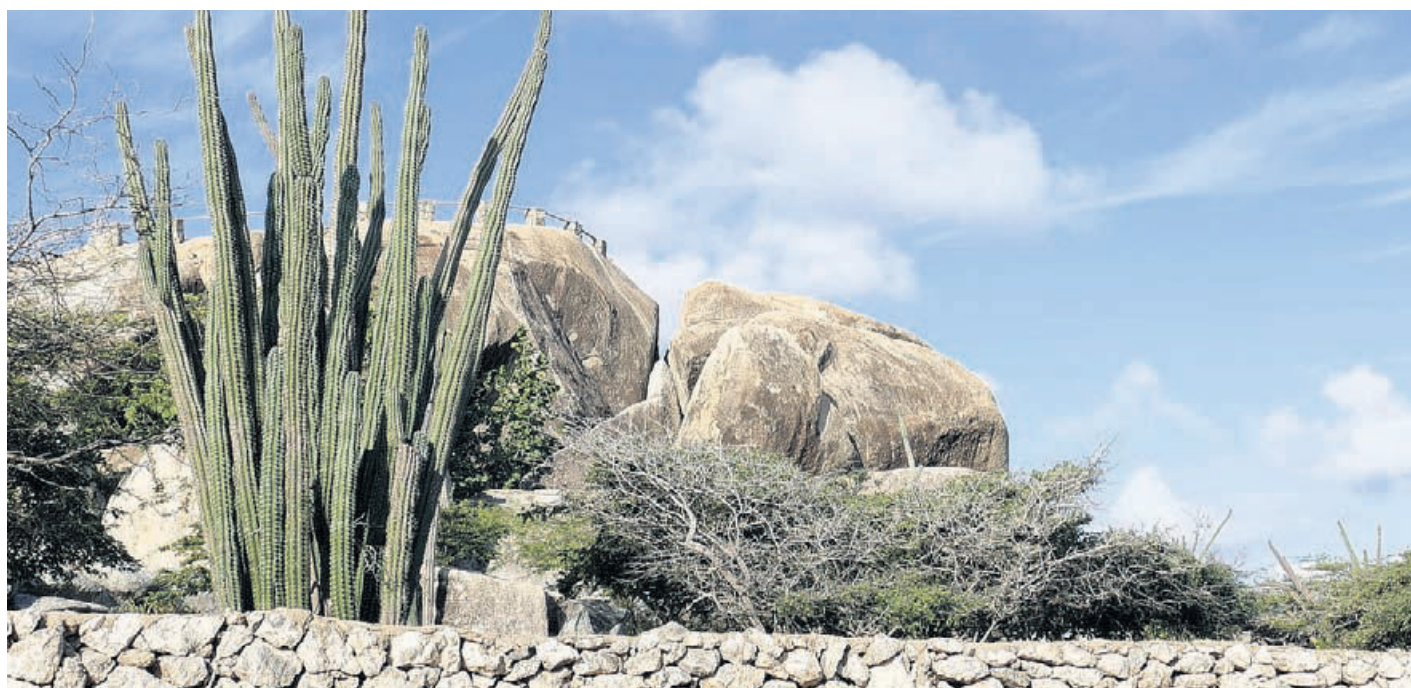
### Casibari

Probably the busier rock formation site, the Casibari is situated more in the center of the island, much closer—and more accessible—to the general public. Just like Ayo, Casibari is a fenced area containing several boulders that lay on top or lean on each other. The best aspect of the Casibari Rock Formation is the accompanying view

when you climb up the top of the round, flat bolder. For this position, you can see the majority of the island and the ocean in the south.

Both sites are open free to the public, 24 hours a day. However, unless you are taking a trip with a professional tour guide, there are no guides at the sites to help you climb the rock. So, do be careful when trudging on the boulders, and make sure to befriend any roaming goats you see along the way!

\*Mondi: what we call our Aruban wilderness. We don't have forests, or deserts, but we do have mondi! □



## Beaches for the whole family to enjoy!

**(Oranjestad)—One of the biggest concerns that parents have when traveling with their children is a guarantee of their safety and healthy enjoyment. Therefore, we thought it would be a great help to traveling parents to list off some the most family-friendly beaches around the island.**

### Baby Beach in San Nicolas

Baby Beach is one Aruba's most popular and visited beaches, and for good reason: This sandy and quiet lagoon is a great place for parents to sit back and relax while their children play in the shallow shores of the beach. Beside the relaxing atmosphere, there are also several services that may accommodate your stay, like a parking lot, sun tent rentals, chairs, bathrooms and a snack bar right at the far left of the beach.

### Mangel Halto in Pos Chiquito

Mangel Halto is situated in the

back streets of Pos Chiquito. Though there are several stairs on the sides of the beach cliff leading you down, the best spot for families to hang out is across the bridge, passed the mangrove trees near the entrance sign. Here, there are small and big palapas, perfect for big and small families to set up their belongings. In this area, the shore is also shallow, falling right around your knee before slowly getting deeper: perfect for kids to safely play.

### Eagle Beach/Palm Beach

Yet another highly popular beach sites, Eagle Beach and Palm Beach is where most of our visitors go to tan, swim or play in the white sand. Because they are near the low-rise and high-rise hotel areas, these beaches are the most accessible for visitors on foot. These beaches also offer many palapas free to use, but you can also rent chairs and tents. Much like Baby Beach,



these sites are one of the best beaches for your children to play and build sand castles.

### Boca Catalina in Malmok

Boca Catalina is a small bay beach near the Malmok beach area further down the hotel areas. Though

it may not be a very sandy beach, it is relatively quiet and tranquil. This is a great place for family to lay down a big blanket and have a little picnic. This is also one of the best places to snorkel, as this area is filled with little fish and corals, even close to the shore. □



CROSSWORD

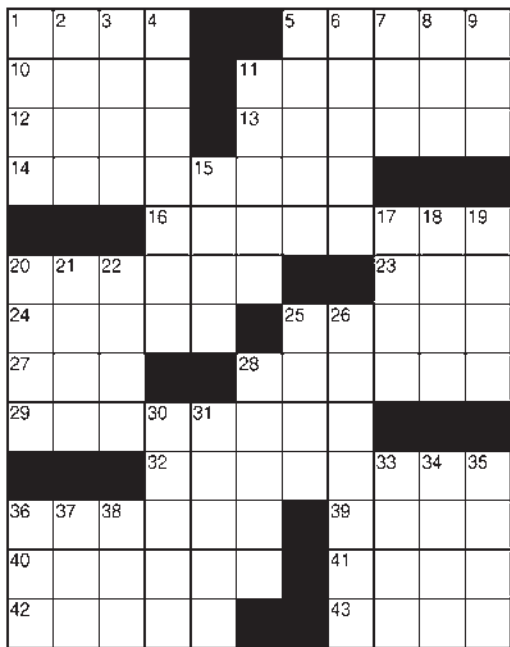
By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Guinness of film  
5 Get naked  
10 Costa —  
11 Option  
12 Love, Latin-style  
13 Forest worker  
14 Genuine  
16 Something for nothing  
20 Benders  
23 Knight's title  
24 Seaport setting  
25 Hue  
27 IRS employee  
28 Dead ducks  
29 Site of some diners  
32 Christmas season  
36 Wan  
39 Concept  
40 German subs  
41 Castle circler  
42 Chili need  
43 Building wings

DOWN

- 1 Swift horse  
2 Long ride  
3 Bus. sch.  
4 Wine bottles  
5 Hue  
6 Copier need  
7 Equip  
8 Water cooler  
9 Pricing word  
11 Calls out  
15 Stew  
17 Cruise stop  
18 Designer Christian  
19 Goes astray  
20 Wound reminder  
21 Possum of the comics  
22 Pro —  
25 Write an app  
26 Former  
28 Adorns, in a way  
30 Singer Bob  
31 Legal actions  
33 Pop star  
34 Start a hand  
35 Puts away  
36 Place for a pint  
37 Penny prez  
38 Mauna —



2-9

AXYDLBAAXR  
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

2-9 CRYPTOQUOTE

CU NKQ XK EKH MKWZ RZ C  
DSIMM EKH GZ MKWZX! CU C  
XK EKH MKWZ NKQ C  
DSIMM EKH MKWZ. — DIRQZM  
GZFBZHH

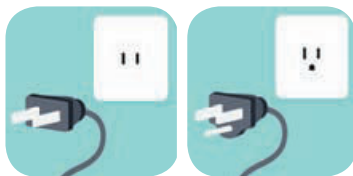
Cryptoquote: LOVE DOESN'T MAKE THE WORLD GO 'ROUND. LOVE IS WHAT MAKES THE RIDE WORTHWHILE. — FRANKLIN P. JONES

Cruise ship Schedule: Jan. 28 - 31 2026

|     |    |                      | ARR   | DEPT  | BERTH |   |
|-----|----|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| WED | 28 | CELEBRITY SILHOUETTE | 08.00 | 23.00 | B     | 1 |
|     |    | NORWEGIAN SKY        | 11.00 | 20.00 | C     | 1 |
|     |    | CARNIVAL VISTA       | 13.00 | 23.00 | I     | 1 |
|     |    | FREEWINDS            | 06.00 | ****  | E     | 1 |
| THU | 29 | COSTA PACIFICA       | 07.00 | 22.00 | B     | 1 |
|     |    | AIDASOL              | 08.00 | 18.00 | C     | 1 |
|     |    | NORWEGIAN DAWN       | 11.00 | 20.00 | I     | 1 |
| FRI | 30 | MS RENAISSANCE       | 09.00 | 18.00 | B     | 1 |
|     |    | EXPLORA II           | 09.00 | 22.00 | C     | 1 |
| SAT | 31 | SILVER SHADOW        | 08.00 | ****  | B     | 1 |
|     |    | AIDAPERLA            | 09.00 | 21.00 | C     | 1 |
|     |    | CARIBBEAN PRINCESS   | 09.00 | 22.00 | I     | 1 |

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic but important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.



Electrical power

Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.



Drinking water

The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.



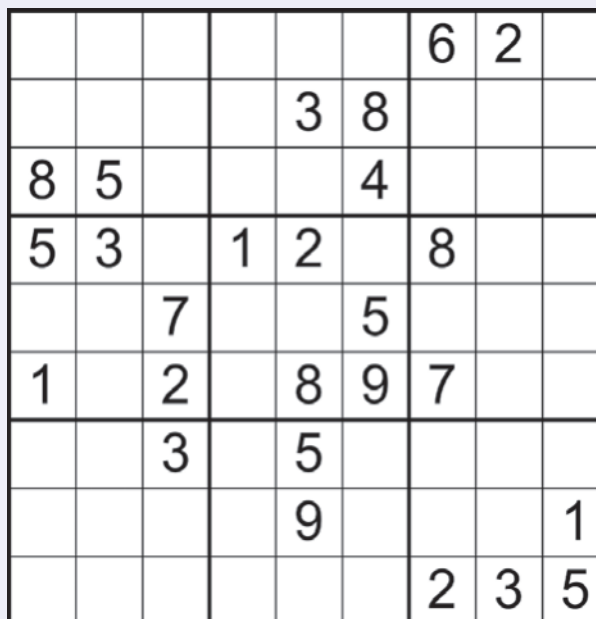
Safety

Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occur, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

SUDOKU

To play sudoku, use logic to fill the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9 only once. Puzzle difficulty increases from Monday to Sunday.

King Classic Sudoku



Difficulty: ★★★★★

1/30

Answer to previous puzzle

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | 8 | 9 | 5 | 7 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| 4 | 7 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 8 | 9 | 5 |
| 1 | 5 | 2 | 8 | 9 | 3 | 4 | 6 | 7 |
| 3 | 9 | 1 | 4 | 6 | 2 | 5 | 7 | 8 |
| 8 | 6 | 4 | 9 | 5 | 7 | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| 5 | 2 | 7 | 3 | 1 | 8 | 6 | 4 | 9 |
| 7 | 1 | 8 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 9 | 2 | 3 |
| 9 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 8 | 1 | 7 | 5 | 4 |
| 2 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 3 | 9 | 1 | 8 | 6 |

Difficulty: ★★★

1/29



# Bring the desert's warmth indoors this winter with big, bold succulents

By ANITA SNOW  
Associated Press

**TUCSON, Ariz. (AP)** — Shallow dishes crowded with tiny, drought-resistant plants in shades of green, red and purple are pretty much all most people know about indoor succulents gardening. But there's another way to bring the warmth of the desert into your home when it's too cold to garden outside. Go big and bold with indoor succulent gardens, suggests Marylee Pangman, a Tucson-based educator and writer who specializes in desert container gardening. "Pick just one statement plant and see how you do before expanding the collection," recommended Pangman, who has designed, built and maintained gardens for hundreds of clients in southern Arizona. "Success builds confidence."

You could grow an architectural succulent in a huge ceramic floor pot, such as a green and yellow snake plant with tongue-like leaves stretching toward the ceiling, Pangman offered. Or try an African milk tree, which grows upright with many arms and can reach 6 feet (1.8 meters) tall indoors. Succulents, including the subspecies of cactuses, are plants with fleshy tissues that conserve moisture. They come in many shapes and sizes, and the larger structural varieties especially command attention. Pangman said succulents are perfect for busy people or retirees who want gardens that are enjoyable and not a chore. Far easier to care for than thirstier plants, succulents usually require less light and water, sometimes just once every two to four weeks.

"Anyone can grow succulents," Pangman said. "They are especially great if you travel a lot." Pangman had no gardening experience when she



**Tiny striped succulents known as zebra plants appear in Tucson, Ariz., on Nov. 9, 2025.**

Associated Press

moved to Tucson in 1996 to escape upstate New York winters. Within two years, she had studied to be a master gardener and launched The Contained Gardener, her potted-landscape design business. Pangman later sold the business and now shares her knowledge through her writing, including the book "Getting Potted in the Desert" and her website and Substack platform. She also teaches online classes on her own platform and through the Tucson Botanical Garden. These are her recommendations for growing large succulents indoors.

## Plants

Consider your home's indoor lighting and avoid plants that are fast-growing or can grow abnormal-

ly large.

For high light or south-facing areas: Consider more vertical-shaped architectural and medicinal aloe vera plants that can grow 2 to 3 feet (0.6 to 0.9 meters) high. Several agaves also do well with south-facing areas, including the fox tail (agave attenuata), a sculptural plant that forms rosettes and can spread 3 to 4 feet (0.9 to 1 meter) wide. In a smaller home, consider the striking Queen Victoria agave or the Blue Elf aloe hybrid.

For medium light, or east- and west-facing areas: The dramatic African milk tree (Euphorbia trigona), the classic jade plant (Crassula ovata), the velvety-leaved felt bush (Kalanchoe beharensis) and the tree-like Aeonium arboreum, which forms rosette clusters on

woody stems.

For lower light, north-facing areas: The sturdy snake plant (Sansevieria trifasciata) is a winner, as are the shade-tolerant gasteria varieties with their dagger-shaped leaves. The somewhat smaller zebra plant (Haworthia fasciata) makes a statement when planted in a group. And while it isn't technically a succulent, Pangman likes the ZZ plant, or zamiifolia, which has glossy leaves and stems and can live in very low light with infrequent watering.

## Pots

Containers for the larger plants should be especially big, with a diameter of at least 18 to 22 inches (46 to 56 centimeters) and a depth of 16 to 18 inches (41 to 46 centimeters). Don't buy plastic pots. Choose breathable terracotta, glazed ceramic or lightweight resin containers with drainage holes.



## Editor

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## Editors

Pilar Flores  
Richard Brooks  
Angenette Figuereo  
Oriana Geerman

## Sales

Mark Gomes  
Sulaika Croes

## Classifieds

classified@cspnv.com

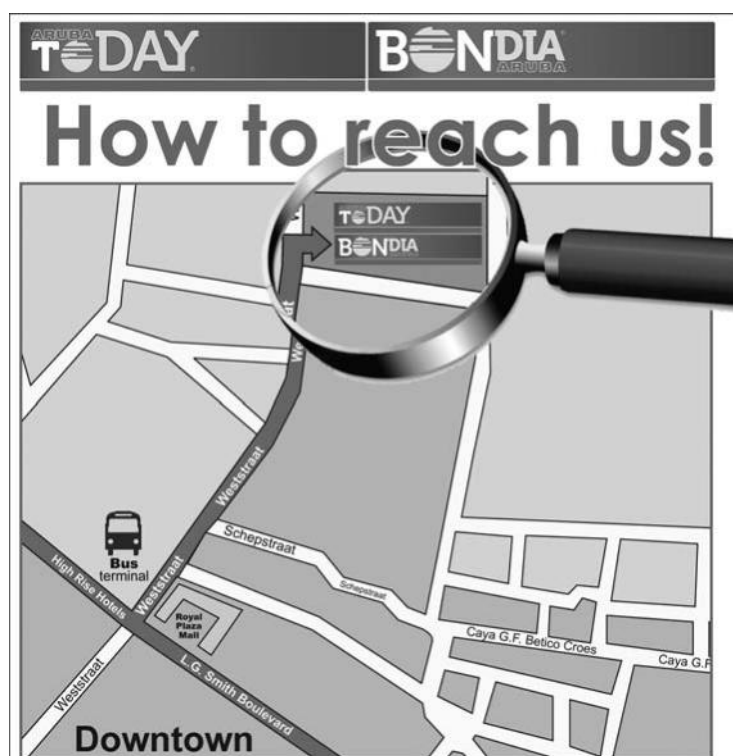
## Distribution and Collection

accounting@bondia.com

## Social / Website

Juan Luis Pinto

Weststraat 22  
T: 582-7800  
E: news@arubatoday.com  
W: www.arubatoday.com  
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ARUBA TODAY NEWS



# Where are those darn keys? Tricks for remembering where you put things

By **ALBERT STUMM**  
**Associated Press**

With a scarf dangling from your coat pocket and those gloves left behind at the coffee shop, there are simply more things to lose in winter. That's not counting your misplaced keys at home or those exasperated moments looking for your phone when you say, "I just had it!"

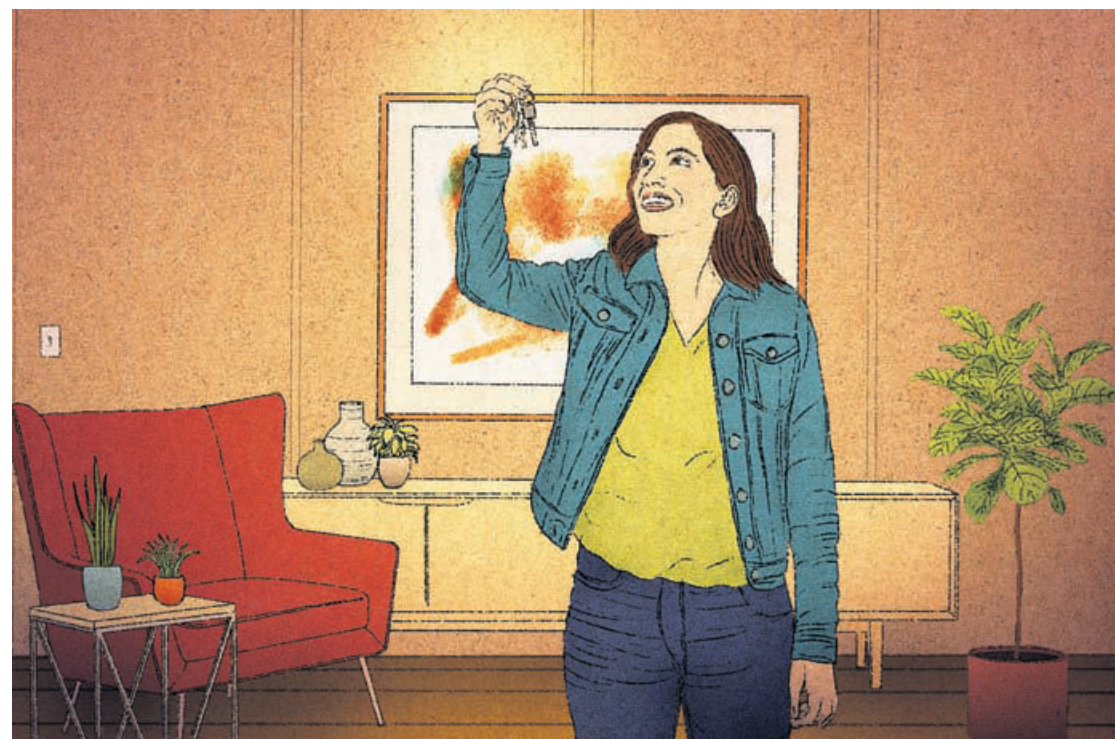
Try not to beat yourself up. Even Mark McDaniel, who has been studying human memory and learning for almost 50 years, left a hat under his chair recently at a restaurant. He doesn't usually wear hats, so he forgot it.

"I should know how to remember to remember, but at the moment, you don't think you're going to forget," said McDaniel, professor emeritus of psychological and brain sciences at Washington University in St. Louis.

Luckily, there are strategies. If you can remember to implement them, here's how to stop losing things.

## A breakdown in the brain

Daniel L. Schacter, a Harvard University psychology



(Associated Press Illustration / Peter Hamlin)

professor and author of "The Seven Sins of Memory," said losing things is something everyone is prone to, to varying degrees. It depends on life circumstances that pull the mind away from the present.

Rather than having a bad memory, it might be "a breakdown at the interface of memory and attention," Schacter said. "That's what's responsible, based on research, based on

personal experience, for a lot of the memory failures that would result in losing things."

Memory occurs in three phases in the brain: encoding, storage and retrieval. Schacter likened losing your keys to drivers who arrive at their destination safely without remembering how they got there.

In both cases, the memory of the action is not encoded because people were

thinking of something else, which makes it harder to retrieve the memory later.

"You have to do a little bit of cognitive work," Schacter said. "At the time of encoding, you have to focus your attention."

## For things you use regularly

It helps to not have to remember where some things are.

Schacter suggested identifying problem items such

as your phone, wallet or keys and creating a structure that becomes automatic with practice. He always leaves his reading glasses in a specific spot in the kitchen. When he goes golfing, his phone always goes into the same pocket in his golf bag.

"Maybe not always, but, you know, a very high percentage of the time," he said.

If there is a noticeable increase in losing things compared to the recent past, accompanied by other memory problems that interfere with your normal function, it might be time to see a doctor, Schacter said.

## For things you don't use regularly

McDaniel said that the brain does a better job at remembering things when it receives several bits of information that can later be connected. Among memory researchers, it's known as elaboration. One way to stop losing objects you don't habitually use but often lose, like a hat is to say out loud where you put it when you put it down. □

# U.S. life expectancy hit an all-time high in 2024, CDC says

By **MIKE STOBBE**  
**AP Medical Writer**

**NEW YORK (AP)** — U.S. life expectancy rose to 79 years in 2024 the highest mark in American history.

It's the result of not only the dissipation of the COVID-19

pandemic, but also waning death rates from all the nation's top killers, including heart disease, cancer and drug overdoses.

What's more, preliminary statistics suggest a continued improvement in 2025.



People are silhouetted against the sky at sunset as they run at Shawnee Mission Park, Sept. 26, 2024, in Shawnee, Kan.

Associated Press

"It's pretty much good news all the way around," said Robert Anderson, of the National Center for Health Statistics at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which released the 2024 data on Thursday. Life expectancy, a fundamental measure of a population's health, is an estimate of the average number of years a baby born in a given year might expect to live, given death rates at that time.

For decades, U.S. life expectancy rose at least a little bit almost every year, thanks to medical advances and public health measures. It peaked in 2014, just shy of 79 years.

It was relatively flat for several years before plunging as the COVID-19 pandemic

killed more than 1.2 million Americans. In 2021, life expectancy fell to just under 76 1/2 years. It has been rebounding since.

The data reflect not only a complete turnaround from the pandemic but also a lasting improvement in the drug overdose epidemic, said Andrew Stokes, a researcher at Boston University.

The bad news is that the U.S. still ranks below dozens of other countries, Stokes noted.

"There's a lot more to be done," he said.

In 2024, about 3.07 million U.S. residents died, about 18,000 fewer than the year before. Death rates declined across all racial and ethnic groups, and in both men and women.

Heart disease remained the nation's leading cause of death, but the death rate due to it dropped by about 3% for the second year in a row. A combination of factors are likely at play, including advances in medical treatments and weight management, said Dr. Sadiya Khan, who treats and studies heart disease at Northwestern University.

Deaths from unintentional injuries a category that includes drug overdoses fell the most, dropping more than 14% in 2024. COVID-19, which only a few years ago was the nation's No. 3 killer, in 2024 dropped out of the top 10.

COVID-19's fall meant suicide moved into the top 10, even though suicides in 2024 declined. □



# Sabalenka into fourth straight Australian Open final and facing Rybakina again

By JOHN PYE  
AP Sports Writer  
MELBOURNE, Australia (AP)

— Not even a point penalty for hindrance slowed Aryna Sabalenka's run to a fourth consecutive Australian Open final.

The top-ranked Sabalenka overpowered Elina Svitolina 6-2, 6-3 Thursday night to move within one victory of a third Australian Open title in four years.

A rematch of the 2023 final against Elena Rybakina was set up when the No. 5 seed ousted No. 6 Jessica Pegula 6-3, 7-6 (7) in the second semifinal.

Her semifinal was mostly one way until Rybakina had match point. The 2022 Wimbledon champion missed three match points on Pegula's serve and then was broken twice while serving for the match.

Pegula rallied and had two set points in the tiebreaker but wasn't able to convert, and Rybakina finally clinched it 29 minutes after her first match point.

"Really, really stressful," Rybakina said. She admitted to flashbacks from the 2024 Open when she lost the longest women's tiebreaker ever at a Grand Slam to Anna Blinkova 22-20 in a three-set defeat.

"I'm proud no matter the situation. It got very tight, I stayed there," she said of the win over Pegula. "I was fighting for each point."



**Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus plays a forehand return to Elina Svitolina of Ukraine during their semifinal match at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne, Australia, Thursday, Jan. 29, 2026.**

For Pegula, it became a matter of swing or miss out. "Sometimes when you're on the brink of losing everything you get a little clarity because you're kind of just like, 'Screw it, I'm just going to try and stay in this,'" she said. "I played a couple of really good points to save the match points, and, you know, she missed a couple short balls ... a couple free points to take some pressure off."

All four players reached the semifinals without dropping a set in Australia for the first time in 56 years and Sabalenka and Svitolina were

each on 10-match winning streaks to start the season after titles in warmup events.

Sabalenka kept both of her streaks alive. As has become customary for Ukrainians against players from Russia and Belarus, there was no handshakes at the net. There was also no group photo before the match.

Sabalenka is the third woman in the Open era to reach four consecutive singles finals at the Australian Open after Evonne Goolagong Cawley and Martina Hingis. "It's an incredible achievement but the job's not done

yet," an emotional Sabalenka said in her on-court TV interview. "I've been watching her game, (Svitolina) was playing incredible. I felt like I had to step in and put as much pressure as I could back on her. I'm glad the level was there. I think I played great tennis."

## The hindrance call

The only hiccup was the hindrance to start the fourth game. Hindrance is called for a distraction that prevents a player from making a shot, and can include an opponent's loud noise. Umpire Louise Azemar Engzell deemed Sabalenka

made a prolonged grunt after she shanked a forehand. The shot seemed to be going long but landed inside the baseline, giving Svitolina the chance to play on. That's when the umpire intervened.

Sabalenka asked for a video review but, after going to the tape, Azemar Engzell confirmed her decision that the grunt was more elongated than usual.

"That's actually never happened to me ... especially with my grunting," Sabalenka said. "Then she called it, and I was, like, 'What? What is wrong with you?'"

Sabalenka said it worked as motivation she broke serve in that game.

"It actually helped me I was more aggressive. I was not happy with the call, and it really helped me to get that game," Sabalenka said. She added with a laugh, "So if she (Azemar Engzell) ever wants to do it again like, I want to make sure that she's not afraid of it go ahead, call it. It's going to help me."

## Rematch

Rybakina is back into a major final for the first time since '23, and says she learned a lot from that match. She's also coming off a win over Sabalenka in the deciding match of the WTA Finals last November, when she picked up a record \$5.2 million in prize money. □

## U.S. star Crystal Dunn announces retirement from soccer at age 33

PARIS (AP) — United States international Crystal Dunn has retired from professional soccer after a decorated playing career to spend more time with her family. The 33-year-old New York native helped the U.S. win the 2019 Women's World Cup and the gold medal at the Paris Olympics.

"This decision has not come easily, but I am at peace and deeply fulfilled with all that I have accomplished," she wrote in an Instagram post Thursday. "I've achieved nearly everything I dreamed of in this sport and gave all I had to give."

"I'm ready to embrace the life that awaits me on the other side," she continued. "I

look forward to spending more time with my family and being a more present mom."

Dunn was under contract with Paris Saint-Germain, which said Thursday that both sides agreed to end their collaboration. A versatile player who contributed from multiple positions, Dunn had joined PSG in January 2025 after she left Gotham FC in the National Women's Soccer League. She made nine appearances for PSG, scoring two goals and providing two assists.

Dunn appeared in 160 games for the United States, scoring 25 goals. □



**United States' Crystal Dunn passes during the first half of the FIFA Women's World Cup Group E soccer match between Portugal and the United States at Eden Park in Auckland, New Zealand, Aug. 1, 2023.**

Associated Press



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## NFL stars Travis and Jason Kelce help Laila Edwards' family attend her Olympic debut

By **JOHN WAWROW**  
AP Hockey Writer

It wasn't easy for Laila Edwards' parents, missing much of their daughter's formative years developing into women's hockey Olympian away from her roots in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. Thanks to an outpouring of donations, including a major push from the hometown NFL brother tandem of Travis and Jason Kelce, they will be making the trip to join Edwards making her Olympic debut at the Milan Cortina Games next week.

A GoFundMe drive launched shortly after Edwards was named to the U.S. roster this month had generated more than \$59,000 through Wednesday. The amount surpassed the goal of \$50,000, and has the Edwardses making plans to bring up to 14 members of their immediate family,



**Laila Edwards, center, the first Black woman to suit up for Team USA women's Olympic hockey, poses for a photo with her parents, Charone Gray-Edwards, left, and Robert Edwards, right, in her childhood home in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, Wednesday, Nov. 5, 2025.**

from maternal grandmother Ernestine Gray to Laila's nephew Shiloh.

"Oh my goodness," mother Charone Gray-Edwards said this week. "I was going to find words to describe the gratitude and appre-

ciation. But I haven't yet." Said father Robert Edwards: "We're humbled by it."

The significance isn't lost on Laila Edwards, who left home at 13 to attend the Bishop Kearney Selects Academy in Rochester,

New York, before moving on to Wisconsin, where she is completing her senior season for the top-ranked Badgers. "Obviously, my name's on the roster, but I feel like my whole family made it to the Olympics," Edwards told The Associated Press during a Zoom call promoting Downy Rinse. "All the sacrifices they've made, the things they've done to get me here, my parents, my siblings, I'm so grateful. And for them to get to come and share the experience is going to be really special."

Edwards, who celebrated her 22nd birthday on Sunday, is considered the future face of women's hockey and will become the first Black female hockey player to represent the U.S. at the Olympics. She's a forward-turned-defender, and at 6-foot-1 (185 centi-

meters) and 195 pounds (88 kilograms) has speed and play-making ability galore. Though she's spent much of her life away from home, Edwards cherished growing up in Cleveland and rooting for LeBron James and the Kelces, Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis and retired Philadelphia Eagles center Jason.

She also got to know Blake Bolden, who is from Euclid, Ohio. Bolden is now a scout for the NHL's Los Angeles Kings and was the first Black player to compete in the National Women's Hockey League.

"Cleveland is my home, and it means everything to me," said Edwards, who was dubbed by her U.S. teammates as the "Queen of Cleveland" following a U.S.-Canada game played there in November. □